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N6 D16

# **Hillhouse Avenue**

**From 1809 to 1900**





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Mrs. Henrietta Frances (Silliman) Dana.

# Hillhouse Avenue

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From 1809 to 1900



HILLHOUSE AVENUE, LOOKING NORTH FROM TRUMBULL STREET.



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From 1809 to 1900

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THE FOLLOWING REMINISCENCES WERE COLLECTED  
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THE WRITER WOULD EXPRESS HERE HER GRATEFUL  
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS TO THE FRIENDS WHO HAVE AIDED  
HER IN GIVING ACCURACY TO THIS BRIEF RECORD.

HENRIETTA SILLIMAN DANA

OCTOBER, 1900

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Reprinted, October, 1907

In memory of

HENRIETTA SILLIMAN DANA

1823-1907

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THE SILLIMAN HOUSE ON THE CORNER OF TRUMBULL STREET WITH THE  
BRIDGE OVER THE NORTHAMPTON CANAL. FROM A DRAWING  
BY ROBERT BAKEWELL, ABOUT 1836.

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# HILLHOUSE AVENUE

FROM 1809 TO 1900

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The first house in Hillhouse Avenue was the one where long dwelt Professor Benjamin Silliman. It was built by the Hillhouses, with very thick stone walls, perhaps two years before it was purchased by Professor Silliman in 1809, but had not been occupied except by a man in charge of the property. In September, 1809, Professor Silliman brought his bride there. She was a daughter of the second Governor Trumbull, and in 1814 Mrs. Trumbull, who had been some years a widow, came to reside with her daughter. Doubtless it was from that connection that Trumbull Street received its name; it was early called "New Street," and on a map of the city published in 1827, it is named "Second Street." There is in the possession of his family, in the hand-writing of Professor Silliman, a sketch of the house in its original condition, and as it continued till 1814, when some considerable addition to it was made. He gives the location as the northwest corner of *Temple Avenue* and *New Street*. The change of name to Hillhouse Avenue was made by vote of the Common Council, Sept. 3, 1830.\* Professor Silliman, Jr., was told by

\* Mr. H. T. Blake, who has supplied this date, adds: "Several new street names were given at the same time in order to be put into a map of the City 'soon to be published by Mess. N. & S. Jocelyn'—this is doubtless the same map which appears in the First City Directory (1840) and in which 'Hillhouse Avenue' is duly shown under that name."

the late President Day, who died in 1867 at the age of 94, that he helped Mr. James Hillhouse carry the chain when he laid out the Avenue. In the sketch of the life and character of Mr. Hillhouse, by the Rev. Dr. Leonard Bacon, speaking of his interest in improvements in the growing town of New Haven, Dr. Bacon says that Mr. Hillhouse "brought from a farm he owned in Meriden and set out, partly with his own hands, the elms that now interlock their giant arms over the famous colonnade in Temple Street." We have always understood that the same was true of the elms in Hillhouse Avenue. For many years the Avenue was considered as private property, not coming under the control of the town, and it was long the custom at certain intervals to put a chain from side to side at the foot of the Avenue, to indicate this fact.

Professor Silliman died in his Avenue home in November, 1864: after a time the property was sold, and in 1872-73, the thick stone walls were thrown down and replaced by wood, and the house, much changed by its new owner, was moved about so as to front on Trumbull Street. Later it was purchased by the present occupant, Mr. Charles White. It seems very befitting that the descendants of Roger Sherman should follow the descendants of Governor Trumbull in their abode. This record is made by the only survivor of Professor Silliman's nine children, four of whom died in early childhood.

After the removal of Professor Silliman's house, the corner remained vacant and unsightly until it was purchased by Mr. Charles Farnam in 1884. He

erected the house which within a few years has become the property of Mr. Henry S. Parmelee, who resides there at this date.

The second house built on the Avenue was on the property on the east side, purchased from Yale College in November, 1826, by Mrs. Abigail Whelpley. It was of wood, and still remains, having been known since 1849 as the home of Professor, later President, Noah Porter, and there his two daughters still reside. Mrs. Whelpley, as well as Mrs. Apthorp, was a Davenport. She came here a widow with two young sons.

The third house in the Avenue was of wood and was placed where Professor T. D. Seymour now resides. It was removed from the corner of Whitney Avenue and Trumbull Street, where it was built, and where it was occupied by the late Professor Kingsley. He was an intimate friend of Professor Silliman and of President Day, and the three were associated for fifty years in the government of Yale College. The house was not quite finished at the time of Mr. Kingsley's marriage, about two years after that of Professor Silliman, so that Mr. Kingsley and his bride spent the first month of their married life in the Silliman house. Professor Kingsley lived in the house on Whitney Avenue till after the birth of his two elder sons, George and Henry; the latter, for many years Treasurer of Yale College, also resided in the Avenue as noted below. Later Mr. Kingsley removed to the stone house then owned by the College—now No. 114 Whitney Avenue, where Mr. Frank Fellowes has

recently died,—and subsequently, in 1824-5, he built the brick house on the corner of Temple and Grove Streets, where his only daughter, Mrs. Henry T. Blake, still lives. The wooden house on Whitney Avenue was afterwards the house of Professor S. F. B. Morse, and later of Mrs. Apthorp. Mrs. Apthorp had come to New Haven several years before, with a family of five daughters, and to aid her in her wish to establish a boarding school for young ladies, Mr. Hillhouse proposed to move the house on to the Avenue and change it to meet her wishes. This was probably about 1824.

Mrs. Apthorp's school for young ladies long had a well-deserved reputation. The writer for three years had the privilege of attending it. Of Mrs. Apthorp's five daughters, only three survive: the eldest, who married Dr. Horace Bushnell, still lives at the age of 95, having commenced her life January 1st, 1805; Miss Louisa Apthorp, now 88, and the youngest, Mrs. Head, the wife of a retired surgeon of the United States Army.

In 1833-34, Deacon Nathan Whiting of the Center Church built a brick house in Hillhouse Avenue on the property where Mr. Henry F. English has recently replaced it by a much larger one. The financial depression of 1837 brought disaster to Mr. Whiting, and he left the house, which after some years was purchased by Mr. Sheffield when his daughter was to become the wife of Professor John A. Porter. Professor Porter was one of the early instructors in the Sheffield Scientific School, and died in that house in 1866.

In 1838, Mr. William J. Forbes bought the house occupied by Mrs. Apthorp, and once more the building was moved—this time into Trumbull Street, where it was divided into two parts; Professor Weir now resides in what was the front and larger part. Professor Samuel W. Johnson bought the rear portion containing the school-room and kitchen, enlarged and altered it so as to make it a pleasant home for himself, standing near its old companion.

Upon the then vacant lot Mr. Forbes built a house of brick, stuccoed, for his daughter, who was soon to become the wife of Professor Benjamin Silliman, Jr. Mr. Forbes died in January, 1840, before the house was quite completed. The young people were married and took possession in the May following. Mrs. Silliman died in March, 1878; Professor Silliman in January, 1885, and after a time the property was purchased by Professor T. D. Seymour, who now occupies it.

The next house above Deacon Whiting's was built by Mr. Aaron N. Skinner, who had married Miss Harriet Whiting. Mr. Skinner was a citizen of great wisdom and public spirit, and, as Mayor of New Haven for several years, did much for its improvement. He has left a permanent record in the embellishment of the Grove Street Cemetery. He kept a large and excellent school for boys in his beautiful house. After his death in 1858, the place was purchased by Mr. William W. Boardman, whose widow still resides there at this date.

Mrs. Apthorp, when dispossessed by the purchase of her house by Mr. Forbes, put up another house in 1838

at the head of the Avenue on the same side, and there opened her school anew. The writer was again a pupil in 1839-40. In 1846, Mr. Sampson, who married Miss Emily Apthorp, bought the house after the school had been relinquished, and fitted it up for his summer residence. Mrs. Apthorp ended her long and useful life there in 1877, in her 96th year. The house, after Mr. Sampson's death, was given by his daughter, Mrs. Stevens, and her husband, to Yale College. The place has had many tenants, one of the last being Mrs. Cady, who once again gathered school girls there. It has recently become the property of ex-President Timothy Dwight, who has enlarged and embellished it for his own use.

In the summer of 1849 two new houses were being erected on the west side of Hillhouse Avenue, both for young professors in Yale College. One of these, situated between the houses of Mrs. Apthorp and Mr. Skinner, for Professor John P. Norton, and the second on the southwest corner of Trumbull Street, below Professor Silliman's, for Professor James D. Dana. Professor Norton had but a short life in his pleasant home, and the house was purchased by Mr. John Davenport, a cousin of Mrs. Apthorp. His daughter resided there until 1894, when she died, and the place was bought by Judge Lynde Harrison.

Professor Dana's house was built on the corner of the Avenue and Trumbull Street. A canal was commenced in 1825 to facilitate business between New Haven and Northampton, in which the Hon. James Hillhouse was greatly interested. The scheme was

never a financial success, and in 1845 the railroad company bought the canal and deepened its bed, asking permission to throw the soil removed on to the front of the lot where Professor Dana erected his house in 1849. Up to that date water lay so near the surface that at that time after a drought of two months, in digging for the well, water was struck in eight feet. Professor Dana died in his Avenue home in April, 1895. Within the past year the house has been enlarged, and his eldest son, Professor Edward S. Dana, and his family now reside there with his mother and sister.

Only one more house remains to be mentioned on the west side, that built by Mr. E. S. Wheeler in 1884, south of Professor Silliman, Jr., and on the north portion of the original Silliman property. This was purchased by the late General A. H. Terry, in 1888, and is still the home of his sisters.

The beautiful place at the head of the Avenue, known as "Sachem's Wood," was the last home of the venerable man who was the moving spirit of Hillhouse Avenue, Hon. James Hillhouse, known as the "Old Sachem." This name came to him from a rather marked Indian physiognomy. Reference has already been made to the sketch of his life and character by the Rev. Dr. Bacon. This deserves to be brought anew to the knowledge of those for whose good Mr. Hillhouse labored so faithfully. This house was built by his son James A. Hillhouse, the poet, in 1830, and the father died there in 1832. The only surviving daughter of the poet still lives there.

Going down on the east side of the Avenue, we find on the corner of Sachem Street, the large house a few years since purchased by Mr. Henry L. Hotchkiss, and since then considerably enlarged. It was built in 1860-61, by Mr. Pelatiah Perit, a prominent New York merchant, who came to New Haven in 1859, and who died in this house in 1864. His widow remained there till her death in 1885.

Next to this is the house of the late Mr. James M. B. Dwight, where his widow still resides; it was built by Mr. John S. Graves. The third house was erected by Professor James M. Hoppin, and is now occupied by him; it was finished in 1862. In 1867 Mr. Henry Farnam rented it; later he similarly occupied the Dwight house. This was previous to his building (in 1871) the large house in which Madam Farnam still lives, and with her, her son, Professor Henry W. Farnam and family. Mr. Farnam died in New Haven in September, 1883. He has left enduring records of his benevolence and liberality in the charming drive constructed by him on East Rock, and in the fine College hall that bears his name.

In addition to the Dwight house, Mr. Graves also built that now occupied by Mrs. George B. Farnam. This was purchased by Mr. Tredwell Ketcham before it was quite finished, for his daughter and her husband, Professor D. C. Gilman. Mrs. Gilman died here in October, 1869, and in 1872 Mr. Gilman was called from New Haven to California to be President of the University at Berkeley.



We have come down to the house occupied for some years by Mrs. D. C. Collins and her family. It was built in 1837 by Mrs. Prichard, who came here from Boston several years before, with three young daughters. One of these daughters was the second wife of President Woolsey, another is the widow of the Rev. William H. Goodrich. These were the days when hackmen driving strangers through the Avenue were heard to say,—“This street is occupied by the literary aristocracy of New Haven,” or “Here live rich widows from Boston”!

The history of President Porter's house was given earlier, as the second in date from Professor Silliman's. The house of Professor George P. Fisher adjoining was built in 1864. This brings us to the corner of the Avenue and Trumbull Street.

The residence of Mr. Henry C. Kingsley, built in 1856-7, was on the southeast corner of the Avenue and Trumbull Street. He was long Treasurer of Yale College, and died in 1886. His widow remained here till 1896, when she sold the place to Judge John Hall, President of the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad, and herself removed to California.

The construction of the New Haven and Northampton Canal, later converted into a railroad as already stated, rendered a bridge necessary in the Avenue. There is little to tell of the occupancy below the bridge until recent dates. On the west side, not far from Grove Street, was for some years the modest home of one who had been a hero of the Revolution, Deacon Nathan Beers. He was in charge of a Medical Botan-

ical Garden connected with the Medical College. That building stood on the corner of Grove and Prospect Streets, and in 1859 it became the property of the Scientific School, and was modified accordingly. The Botanical Garden was situated on Grove Street, between the Medical College and the Avenue; some of the wood flowers cultivated in the Garden still blossom here each Spring.

Deacon Beers, as a Lieutenant, was one of the guard in charge of Major André, and through him the sketch of the unfortunate young officer, made by his own hand the day before his execution, became the property of the College. It is with other articles in a small case in the University Library and with it is the printed account of its history, and also President Day's letter acknowledging the gift. The venerable couple were very interesting. Mrs. Beers in advanced life was still a beautiful woman. Deacon Beers received a pension when perhaps over 90, and his first thought was to meet debts which had weighed heavily on his upright spirit.

After some years, Mr. Ithiel Town bought the property on the west side of the Avenue. During the erection of his residence, the Beers house was occupied by Dr. Peters, a son-in-law of Mr. Town, and upon its completion (about 1837-38) the latter was removed. Mr. Town was well known as an architect; the State Capitol of New Haven (recently removed), and the City Hall in Hartford, were built under his direction. He also built various bridges on a plan of his own devising. In putting up his own

house he had principally in view the accommodation of his large library, especially rich in works on art, which after his death in 1844 was given in part to Yale College.

Subsequently the house had various owners, the last being Mr. Joseph E. Sheffield, whose name was so justly given to the Scientific School. During all its progress he was its friend and benefactor, and with his customary liberality he bequeathed this property to that institution. In 1889, the Sheffield mansion was taken possession of by the Scientific School, and converted into a well-equipped Biological Laboratory.

On Grove Street, at the foot of the Avenue on the east side, a small schoolhouse was early erected by Mr. James Hillhouse. Many of the friends of the writer, as well as herself, were scholars here and have interesting reminiscences connected with it; this was later moved away.

The first house on the east side of the Avenue below the bridge was built in 1856, by Mr. William Hillhouse, a nephew of Hon. James Hillhouse. Some years later (1870-74) the Catholic Church followed, and since then various College Society Buildings have sprung into existence, including one above the bridge on property bought from President Hall.

October, 1900.

[The death of Mrs. Dana, the author of this pamphlet, took place on January 31, 1907, and since its issue, in 1900, the following persons mentioned in it have also died: Miss Louisa Apthorp, Mrs. W. W. Boardman, Mrs. Horace Bushnell, Mrs. Henry Farnam, Mrs. George B. Farnam, Judge John M. Hall, Judge Lynde Harrison, Mrs. J. F. Head, Miss Isaphene Hillhouse, Mr. and Mrs. William Hillhouse, Prof. and Mrs. J. M. Hoppin, Mrs. Henry L. Hotchkiss, Mr. Henry S. Parmelee, Miss Rebecca Porter, Miss Jane R. Terry.

The Boardman house has recently been purchased by Mr. Rutherford Trowbridge, and the Hoppin house by Mr. John Brewster Fitch. The Fisher house is now occupied by the Bristol family from 65 Elm Street, Prof. Fisher's health having failed to such a degree that he now lives at Litchfield.

October, 1907.]







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